Detecting Cross-lingual Marketing Blunders

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1. Introduction

Large companies increasingly advertise and sell their products in international markets. Developing a marketing campaign for a new country requires tremendous translation efforts in order to bridge language-related and cultural boundaries. A particular problem often occurs if an established product or company name is used in a new foreign market without being adapted to local habits and language use. This regularly yields offensive, embarrassing, or (at best) funny results causing excessive remedial cost and maybe even the withdrawal of the product from the new market.

A common example is the word *mist*, which is used to describe fabulous, enigmatic, lightweight, or mystic things in English. The word has, for instance, been used by a British car manufacturer to advertise their *Silver Mist* model. In German, the homograph *Mist* means, however, dung or manure, and it is a frequently used slang expression to describe a futile, cheap, or broken product, nonsense, or an annoying, tedious situation. This pejorative meaning has caused the car manufacturer to rename its product. Hereafter, we will concentrate on such cross-lingual marketing blunders.

2. Task description

Along with this annotation guidebook, you'll receive a spreadsheet that can be opened in Microsoft Excel or OpenOffice (please contact the authors in case of any problems with opening the file). The spreadsheet contains the following columns:

- **Blunder text**: a product/company name or marketing slogan that has failed in a certain language community (e.g., Silver Mist). You can find the full list of marketing blunders and explanations on why each blunder failed in the appendix of this document.
- **Lexeme**: one part of the blunder text or an orthographic variant of it (e.g., mist).
- **Language**: the language, the lexeme is in (e.g., German).
- **Translation**: a translation of the lexeme into German or English (e.g., manure).
- **Annotation**: the column, we ask you to fill in your decision (as described below).
- **Definition**: A short definition of the lexeme and its translation in German or English.

We call each row in the spreadsheet a *clue*. Your task is to judge if a clue is relevant or irrelevant for identifying a marketing blunder. That is to say, we ask you to decide if the given clue informs about a pejorative, vulgar, embarrassing, or otherwise distractive meaning which causes the product/company name (i.e., the blunder text) to fail. For the example of "Silver Mist" introduced above, a clue telling you that *Mist* means *manure* in German is relevant, since *manure* has a negative connotation and is considered vulgar. A clue explaining that *mist* means *fog* in Swedish is irrelevant, because *fog* does not yield negative associations when used as a car name. Thus, please mark each clue with a

> 0   if it is irrelevant and with a
> 1   if it is relevant.

Use the "Annotation" column for that.

Some of the clues refer to vulgar or embarrassing expressions that appear to be a relevant hint for detecting a marketing blunder. However, please always take the word form (i.e., the "lexeme" column) into account. You should only mark a clue as relevant if you consider the lexeme "similar enough" to cause such a negative association when you read the product/company name (i.e., the blunder text column).

Consider the term *stubit*, for instance. This word form is very similar to the English *stupid* and thus provides a relevant clue for detecting a marketing blunder for *stubit*. As opposed to that, *stupid* would not be a relevant clue for the term *stepid*, although the two forms appear rather similar. The reasons are the differences in the pronunciation and that *stepid* reminds of the English *step it* in the first place, which has no negative connotation.

As a rule of thumb, consider you read and/or hear the blunder text on a newly occurred product in a shop in a country using the specified language. Decide (a) if the given lexeme would potentially come to your mind and (b) if the meaning of the lexeme might cause embarrassment or astonishment that might cause the customers to reject the product. Annotate these cases with a "1".

3. Please note

- Do not imitate an algorithm, rely on your intuition.
- Please read the explanations of the marketing blunders in the appendix before starting with your annotations.
- For each marketing blunder there can be multiple relevant clues. Likewise, it is possible that none of the clues is relevant.
- Some clues are relevant to detect a marketing blunder in a language different to the one of the original blunder explained in the appendix. Please mark those clues also as relevant. If you want, you can use a "2" instead of a "1" to mark these clues.
- You may use external references such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. to make your decision, but we ask you not to discuss your decisions with other annotators.
- As the task gets monotonous at some point, you should consider making breaks during the annotation process.
- Please do not change the order of the rows/cols or their IDs. We'll need this information for further processing. Of course, you are allowed to change the size of the columns to exactly fit on your screen.

There is no correct solution for this task, so please, always judge the clues based on your own understanding. We will measure the inter-annotator agreement of the submissions to find out, how often the participants agree or disagree.

Thank you very much for your contribution!

Appendix: Marketing blunder dataset and explanations

Marketing blunder	Explanation
Olympia Roto (copier)	*roto* means *broken* in Spanish
Kinki Nippon Tourist	*kinki* sounds similar to the English *kinky*
Matador (US car)	*matador* means *killer* in Portuguese
Toyota MR2	*MR2* sounds similar to the French *merde* (excrement)
Studebaker Dictator	*dictatorship* has a negative connotation
Buick LaCrosse (US car)	*la crosse* means *masturbation* in French
Fiera (US car)	*fiera* means *ugly* in Spanish
Mercury Caliente (US car)	*caliente* means sexually aroused in Spanish
Pinto (US car)	*pinto* means small appendage in Brazilian Portuguese
Silver Mist (UK car)	*Mist* means manure and is used as a vulgarity in German
Mist Stick (hair curling iron)	*Mist* means manure and is used as a vulgarity in German
Bundh (UK sauce)	*bundh* means *arse* in Punjabi
Pavian (fruit drink)	*Pavian* means *baboon* in German
Grab Bucket (excavator part)	*Grab* means *grave*, and *bucket* sounds like *bouquet* in German
Vicks (cough drops)	*vicks* sounds similar to the German vulgarity *fick* (sexual intercourse)
Puff tissues (facial tissues)	*Puff* means whorehouse in German and *homosexual* in the UK
Probe (US car)	*Probe* means *test* or *rehearsal* in German
Bardak (machine)	*бардак* means *whorehouse* in Russian
Bran Buds (cereal)	*bran* means *burned* in Swedish
Jotter (US pen)	*jotter* means *jockstrap* in some Latin America markets
Zit! (chocolate)	*zit* is a slang word for *pimple* in English
Sic (French soft drink)	*sic* sounds similar to *sick* in English
Super Piss (Finnish de-icer)	*piss* is a slang word for *urine* in English
Bum (Spanish potato chips)	*bum* is a slang word for *buttocks* in English
Polio (Czech detergent)	*Polio* is a short form of the disease Poliomyelitis
Homo (Asian fish sausage)	*homo* is a short form of *homosexual*
Swine (Chinese chocolate)	*swine* is used pejoratively in English and considered dirty
Ass Glue (Chinese glue)	*ass* is a slang word for *buttocks* in English
Last Climax (Japanese tissues)	*climax* is a slang word for *orgasm* in English
Creap (Japanese coffee creamer)	*creap* sounds similar to *crap* and *creep* in English
Maxipuke (Chinese playing cards)	*puke* is a slang word for *vomit* in English
Pansy (Chinese underwear)	*pansy* is a slang word for *homosexual* in English
Skintababe (Japanese soap)	sounds similar to *skin a babe* in English
PET (US dairy products)	*pet* means *fart* in French
Cue (US toothpaste)	*Cue* is an infamous pornographic magazine in France
Fesca (US soda pop)	*fresca* means *lesbian* in Mexican slang
Misair (Egyptian airline)	*misair* sounds similar to the French *misère* (misery)
EMU Airways (Australian airline)	an *emu* is a bird that can't fly
AMF Corporation (Australian airline)	*AMF* is a short form of *Australian military forces*
Gift (giftware magazine teaser)	*Gift* means *poison* in German
Touch Woody - the Internet Pecker	*woody* and *pecker* are slang words for the male genitals in English
FARTFULL (Swedish furniture)	sounds like *full of farts* in English
Wang Cares (company slogan)	sounds similar to the British *wanker*; *wang* is also an English slang term for the male genitals
Honda Fitta (Japanese car)	*fitta* is a slang word for women's genitals in Swedish
table (agenda item)	means *propose for discussion* in the UK, but *postpone* in the US